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ABSTRACT

A one-page introduction is followed by three pages containing summaries of three journal articles and two documents on teacher selection. Mary Cihak Jensen argues that final selection decisions should be based on multiple information sources, since teaching requires proficiency in many interrelated skills. Superintendent Richard J. Caliendo observes that the selection process and procedures he implemented in Elmont, New York, gather varied information about each candidate. Business and industry have long recognized the importance of matching the appropriate candidate with the job, and Stuart R. Kahl suggests that schools follow these guidelines. Hiring officials should be trained to use a common set of procedures and criteria. Beverly A. Browne and Richard J. Rankin note that academic criteria have become a secondary consideration in many selection systems. Schools determined to raise academic standards should emphasize intellectual ability and candidates' readiness to be held accountable. A study by I. Phillip Young and Herbert G. Heneman III recommends that a school's success in attracting good candidates is influenced by selection officials and procedures. Interviewers' attitudes play a key role in determining whether a teacher will accept a position or turn the school down. (CJH)

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roundup

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Teacher Selection

James J. Heyndericxx

Hiring teachers has always involved some of the most important and complex decisions that school administrators must deal with. Currently a shortage of candidates in many areas of the country—especially in inner-cities and isolated rural districts—has made the task of selecting the best teachers even more challenging.

Contributing to the shortage of teachers is this decade's baby "boomlet," a phenomenon that is forcing many elementary schools to undertake considerable readjustment in order to accommodate to expanding enrollments. Meanwhile the lure of higher salaries is drawing many teachers, often the most able, into business and industry. It is estimated that 40 to 50 percent of first-year teachers will not be teaching seven years from now.

As if these factors did not sufficiently complicate the task of finding capable teachers, research indicates that some school officials have themselves made matters worse by their use of selection procedures that result in candidates of mediocre ability being chosen over those of superior ability.

Through the selection of teachers prepared to make an appropriate contribution, improved selection procedures can play a pivotal role in enhancing a school's climate and elevating its standards. The selection process is indeed the logical place to begin to address the problem of incompetent teachers—the estimated 5 percent of the teaching force who lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and values, and the capacity to grow.

The teacher selection process, researchers say, cannot be made simple or automatic. There is no checklist of qualities an administrator can look for to determine who is likely to become an outstanding teacher and who is likely to become an embarrassment. Teachers must possess a special blend of skills, personality characteristics, and knowledge if they are to become that most valuable of persons—a teacher whom students will admire, work hard for, and truly learn from.

Researcher Mary Cihak Jensen argues that final selection decisions should be based on multiple sources of information, since teaching requires proficiency in many interrelated skills. The policies and procedures being implemented by Superintendent Richard J. Caliendo in Elmont, New York, provide an example of a teacher selection process that gathers varied information about each candidate.

Business and industry have long recognized the importance of choosing the right people for the right job, and Stuart R. Kahl suggests that schools follow the guidelines they have developed. He adds that objectivity could be heightened and random error reduced if school hiring officials were trained in the use of a common set of procedures and criteria.

Beverly A. Browne and Richard J. Rankin note that academic criteria, including most measures of cognitive ability, have somehow become a secondary consideration in many selection systems. Schools specifically determined to raise their academic standards, Browne and Rankin say, need to place renewed emphasis on the intellectual ability and determination of candidates for new positions and their readiness to be held accountable.

Coming at the teacher-recruitment situation from another angle, a study by I. Phillip Young and Herbert G. Heneman III suggests that whether a school manages to sign up good candidates, or lose them to other schools, can be significantly influenced by the selection officials and the procedures involved. The personalities and attitudes of the interviewers, these researchers say, can play a key role in determining whether a teacher will accept a position or turn the school down.

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1 **Jensen, Mary Cihak.** *How to Recruit, Select, Induct, and Retain the Very Best Teachers.* Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon. 1987.

This book's chapter on selection summarizes what is known about the teacher selection process and gives examples of effective practices. With the goal of making recommendations for improvement, Jensen reviews the complexities of teacher selection toward finding clues as to why it is such a difficult process.

Several studies indicate that candidates with the best academic qualifications—as measured by GPA, student-teaching evaluations, and professional recommendations—may not be the first hired. Jensen asks, "Could school districts be contributing to the problems of teachers' competency by not preferring the most promising candidates?" Whereas industrial recruiters seek achievers and leaders, school districts may look for candidates who are enthusiastic, hard working, and cooperative.

Of course, she notes, much of the difficulty of teacher selection arises from the complexity of the teaching function. School administrators are fully aware that important social and personal characteristics are required for scholars to become successful teachers. Further, all studies confirm that "no one measure or test can assess a candidate's potential as a teacher."

In any case, Jensen says, existing selection techniques may be inadequate to the task. Since the act of teaching requires proficiency in a number of interrelated skills, it is imperative that administrators gather multiple information about candidates. Often overlooked sources of information include "direct work samples, critical-incidents tests, live demonstrations, and videotaped presentations."

The interview is acknowledged to be the most influential and widely used selection technique. Yet Jensen insists that if used incorrectly, the interview can be "neither valid nor reliable." Untrained interviewers may decide in the first five minutes of the interview whether to reject or hire an applicant, using the remainder of the interview to add evidence to the predetermined decision. Used correctly, the interview can be a powerful tool. Reliability increases when interviews are structured and a candidate participates in a series of interviews with a selection team. An interviewer should be alert to clues and be able to denote fine distinctions, make accurate records, and suppress biases.

A pitfall that all personnel involved in the selection process must avoid is "matching"—the tendency for interviewers to select applicants similar to themselves. Jensen points to studies indicating that congruence of principals' attitudes with those of prospective teachers sometimes has more bearing on hiring than the candidate's qualifications. Nor, she adds, should candidates be selected just because they match the school's current standards or priorities. Without diversity, weak or mediocre schools will remain the same. "The critical question in hiring," says Jensen, "is not 'Who will fit in?' but 'Who will add to our skills?'"

2 **Caliendo, Richard J.** "Selecting Capable Teachers." *Spectrum*, 4,1 (Winter 1986), pp. 22-26. EJ 334 192.

As part of a program to improve its school system, the Elmont Union Free School District (enrollment 3,000) decided to limit the size of K-2 classes to twenty children in 1984. This meant that eleven new teachers would have to be hired by the next year. To identify the best teachers, Superintendent Caliendo designed a selection process that incorporated an applicant questionnaire, a teaching demonstration, and an interactive group interview.

The questionnaire asked applicants to respond to four essay questions involving class planning, teaching objectives, familiarity with educational literature, and special skills. The applicants answered the questions by describing the techniques and skills they would use in the classroom. Principals and district administrators scored the answers on a Likert-type scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

Candidates with scores averaging 3 or above were asked to teach a twenty-minute lesson to a second- or third-grade class. Administrators rated the lessons on six significant performance variables, including pupil responses, participation, and instructional objectives and techniques.

Immediately following the lesson, each candidate was interviewed by Caliendo and all six district principals. The interview was an opportunity for candidates to ask questions and explain decisions they had made during the performance evaluation. For administrators, the interview allowed a more complete assessment of candidates' personalities. A rating form was used to quantify the observations.

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The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966.

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Between April and June 1984, twenty-seven candidates were completely evaluated by Elmont administrators. Seven were considered exceptional, eight were rated capable or very capable, and twelve were unacceptable. The fifteen acceptable candidates were offered positions.

Since some principals feared that the new procedures could be "threatening" or "tension-producing," a random sample of the twenty-seven applicants was asked to evaluate the new procedures. Of those questioned, 93 percent described the questionnaire as a "valid way for the objective initial screening"; 87 percent considered the teaching demonstration a "valid way to assess a candidate's strengths and weaknesses as a teacher"; and 73 percent described the entire process as "highly desirable for a thorough and objective screening."

A year following the selections, principals were found to have given the fifteen new teachers exceptionally high ratings. Ten were considered outstanding or above satisfactory, three were satisfactory, and two were fair. All will continue to be teachers for the district.

3 Kahl, Stuart R. *The Selection of Teachers and School Administrators: A Synthesis of the Literature.* Denver, CO: Mid-Continent Regional Educational Lab., Inc., February 1980. 95 pages. ED 221 917.

Summarizing literature from some two hundred sources, Kahl describes the "state of the art" in teacher and administrator selection procedures. In offering a critique of current selection policies and criteria, he recommends several school-level improvements that do not require major reforms or the hiring of outside consultants.

Although the selection process typically includes a review of academic credentials, personal references, and recommendations, plus various tests and inventories, the personal interview continues to be the most common approach. However, Kahl notes, school hiring officials seldom have training in interview techniques. Business and industry have developed predetermined interview formats and rating schemes designed to increase objectivity and reduce random error, he points out, and these measurement devices could be equally useful in hiring teachers and administrators. The selection process could also be made more reliable, he adds, by involving administrators, teachers, parents, and school board members in consensus decision-making.

Research has shown, Kahl says, that good predictors of future success as a teacher include performance as a student teacher, communications skills, and key personality traits. Contrariwise, academic credentials (beyond that of a successfully completed teacher education program), physical appearance, IQ scores, National Teacher Examinations scores, and individual philosophies of education are believed to have little or no relevance to later teaching success.

Kahl suggests that because most schools do not have an established policy for selecting teachers and administrators, the most important step toward improving the process is the development of a common set of procedures and criteria. For such a standardized approach to be effective, it "must be tailored to the unique goals, values, philosophies and needs of each district or school."

Kahl further suggests that a skillfully devised selection process can be valuable in bringing about positive change in the representation of minorities in the school system, particularly by identifying good candidates among groups that are currently underrepresented.

4 Browne, Beverly A., and Rankin, Richard J. "Predicting Employment in Education: The Relative Efficiency of National Teacher Examinations Scores and Student Teacher Ratings." *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 46 (Spring 1986), pp. 191-97. EJ 332 471.

Although the National Teacher Examinations (NTE) have been used for over thirty years to evaluate the academic ability of prospective teachers, Browne and Rankin say that scores on the NTE do not correlate well with actual teacher performance in the classroom. A more reliable indicator of future success, they hypothesize, may lie in the opinions of professional educators.

Toward exploring these propositions, Browne and Rankin followed the progress of 111 elementary education college students to determine whether their NTE scores or the ratings of supervisors who had worked with them would be more effective in predicting who would obtain a teaching position within the first year.

As one predictor, they selected the Elementary School Specialty Area Test (EES)—an NTE area examination. Developed to measure cognitive ability in elementary education students, the EES has high ratings for reliability.

To collect data from supervisors who interacted with the students for more than one year during their college preparation, Browne and Rankin used the Student Teacher Rating Form (STRF). Among the questions on the STRF were two that asked the supervisors to judge whether the students would become successful teachers and whether they would be influential in getting things done in their schools. Three additional questions rated the students' emotional maturity, intellectual capacity, and social adeptness.

In analyzing their data, Browne and Rankin found no significant correlation between the students' EES scores and their success in finding jobs. However, four of five questions on the STRF showed positive correlations; high ratings seemed clearly linked to employment—with one exception: There was a negative correlation for the question concerning intellectual

capacity, suggesting that statistically, at least, "being rated bright may be a hindrance in obtaining a job." This negative correlation between intellectual ability and success in finding a job may at first seem questionable, the authors note, but it is in fact "consistent with the weakness in the EES in predicting employment." Both the EES and the STRF indicate that cognitive ability is a secondary consideration in selecting a teacher.

Regarding the implications of their study, Browne and Rankin say that it adds evidence to the theory that professional educators' opinions are more accurate predictors of selection than are cognitive test scores. "The global factor that makes the supervisor evaluate a student as competent," they say, "is probably the same factor that makes the employer perceive the student as worthy of hire."

However, they add, at a time when it is increasingly important to recruit those candidates who are most competent, serious questions must be raised when "personality factors may be more important than knowledge in determining whether or not the novice teacher receives a position."

5 Young, I. Phillip, and Heneman, Herbert G., III. "Predictors of Interviewee Reactions to the Selection Interview." *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 19, 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 29-36. EJ 330 718.

Numerous studies have examined the decision-making of school administrators during the teacher selection process. However, an important void in this literature concerns the decisions made by the candidates—decisions that may equally affect the outcome of the process. Young and Heneman conducted a laboratory simulation to "explore how individuals, as job seekers and applicants, react to organizational recruitment and selection procedures."

The participants in Young and Heneman's study—forty-four educational administrators and sixty-six classroom teachers—took part in a series of simulated interviews through a random selection process. In twenty-two single interviews, an administrator interviewed a teacher as if he or she were an applicant for a teacher position. In twenty-two group interviews, a teacher acting as an incumbent assisted the administrator and also offered information to the interviewee.

After the interviews, the teachers were asked to indicate whether they thought they would have been offered the position and whether they would have accepted it if offered. They also were asked to compare the information they received from the job incumbents with that they received from the interviewers. Further, the teachers reported their impressions of the interviewers' personalities and expressions of personal warmth.

Young and Heneman's findings indicate that the teachers' reactions were "more positive when interviewers tended to be aware of the feelings of interviewees" and "were perceived to project personal warmth toward the candidate." Also preferred were interviewers who "tended to work all the way through before reaching a conclusion." Information received from job incumbents was not considered more influential than information from interviewers.

These findings suggest that the personality characteristics of the interviewer can significantly influence the applicant's decision to accept or reject a job offer. By carefully selecting those who take part in the hiring process and training them to be sensitive and fair toward all applicants, a school district can gain a "competitive edge" in the hiring of the best teachers.

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